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ABSTRACT

By 1985, nearly half of the nation's public school students will be required to pass a minimum competency test (MCT) for high school graduation. Supporters of objectives underlying the MCTs suggest that the tests will force school systems to take their responsibilities to all children more seriously. Critics argue that students who fail will become scapegoats for school system failure, with few, if any, new efforts made to meet their needs. The purpose of this study was to examine the validity of the critics' argument. For students who fail MCTs, are remedial services provided to help them pass the tests on later attempts and, if so, who is paying for these services? Analysis of data collected from thirteen states chosen for having an MCT program statewide, underway at survey time, and MCT results determining high school graduation eligibility, revealed that most students failing the MCT the first time and remain in school eventually meet the competency requirements. Nevertheless, not all students pass, and failure rates are higher among minority students than among nonminority students. Potential problems were identified relating to the "required by law," "proportionate share," and "comparability" provisions of Title I in a section on funding remedial activities. (Author/CE)

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July 1981

Remedial Services for Students Who Fail Minimum Competency Tests

Final Report

By Ernest W. Strang

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By 1985, nearly half of the nation's public school students will be required to pass a minimum competency test (MCT) to graduate from high school. Supporters of the objectives underlying the MCTs suggest that the tests will force school systems to take their responsibilities to all children more seriously. Critics argue that students who fail will become scapegoats for school system failure, with few, if any, new efforts made to meet their needs.

The purpose of this study was to examine the validity of the critics' argument. For students who fail MCTs, are remedial services provided to help them pass the tests on later attempts and, if so, who is paying for these services? To address this topic, answers were sought to four major questions:

- To what extent do students who fail an MCT once also fail on subsequent administrations of the test?
- Are special remedial services available in states currently implementing MCT programs?
- How much is being spent and by what agencies for purposes of MCT-related remediation?
- To what extent do expenditures for these remedial activities reduce the funds available for other instructional programs?

To find answers to these questions, the study examined MCT programs in 13 states (Arizona, California, Delaware, Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Utah, Vermont, and Virginia). These states were selected for examination because they met three criteria:

- The state's MCT program was implemented on a statewide basis;
- The program was underway at the time of data collection; and
- The program was intended to have a direct effect on secondary school students (e.g., determining eligibility for high school graduation).

Data were collected through interviews with state and district personnel. Thirteen districts were visited, and telephone interviews were conducted with personnel in 12 other districts and at the state level.

Analysis of these data revealed that most of the students who fail the MCT on their initial try and who remain in school eventually meet the competency requirements. Even so, not all students pass, and failure rates are higher among minority students than among nonminority students. Data were not available to determine the extent to which drop-out rates are affected by MCT requirements.

Remedial services were available for the students failing an MCT in all of the districts included in this study. Information was not available in most districts, however, to judge whether all students needing help were receiving it nor to estimate the effectiveness of the remedial services. In general, districts within those states which had established state-controlled and administered MCT programs had relatively formal and structured remedial programs.

School district general funds provided the major share of financial resources for MCT-related remediation. Substantial state funds were provided for special remedial services in the districts in six states, however. Finding funds for MCT-related remediation was frequently a problem for those districts with relatively formal remedial programs where the costs were not covered by state funds. Although federal funds were not a major funding source, the most important single source of federal funds was ESEA Title I. Despite the fact that use of Title I funds did not constitute a redirection of those resources in districts where they were being used for this purpose, some potential problems were identified related to the "required by law," "proportionate share," and "comparability" provisions of Title I.

Support of special MCT remediation resulted in reductions of funding for other programs only in districts were (a) state funds were not available for special remedial services and (b) relatively formal remedial programs were underway. In some of these districts, elective subjects were reduced or class sizes were increased. In other districts, funds earmarked for new program initiatives were redirected.

Because there is no clear-cut federal role in this area, the only federal action that is recommended is the continuation of current efforts to stay abreast of the MCT developments. Federal officials should also monitor the extent to which federal policies and requirements, such as those related to ESEA Title I, may have unintended effects on MCT remedial programs.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The recent movement to assess minimum levels of student competence reflects and responds to an increasing public skepticism about the ability of school systems to produce high school graduates who can function effectively as adults in society. Evidence of declining achievement test scores and reports of "social promotions" have contributed to this skepticism and have been reflected by the "back to basics" movement. Supporters of minimum competency tests reason that, by testing high school students to insure that they have achieved a minimum competence level, school systems will be forced to take their educational responsibilities toward all children more seriously. In short, proponents view minimum competency tests as a force behind school-level reform. On the other hand, critics of such tests argue that the main effect of the tests will be to isolate and stigmatize some students through the withholding of high school diplomas or the the award of second-class degrees, which will limit the educational and employment options of such students. They see these students who fail minimum competency tests becoming scapegoats for school system failure, with few, if any, new efforts made to meet their special educational needs.

State or local testing programs which have been labeled minimum competency testing (MCT) programs can be found in each of the 50 states, although the nature of these programs varies widely. This study identified MCT programs in 13 states, for example, which are currently implemented on a statewide basis and in which MCT results have direct effects on students. Many of the remaining

states are in the process of either planning or implementing MCT programs. Over 20 percent of the nation's students now face a state requirement to pass an MCT to graduate*; if planned programs are implemented and if locally developed programs are also counted, about half of the nation's public school students will face such a requirement by 1985. Briefly stated, in the course of the decade between 1975 and 1985, MCT programs will have grown from a local phenomenon to a standard across the country.

This NTS/EPDC study was not an investigation of the broad effects of MCT programs on students or educational improvement. This study had a narrower, though still important, focus: for students that fail MCTs, are remedial services provided to help them pass on subsequent attempts and, if so, who is paying for these activities?

The reason for our focus on the provision of remedial services is the potential importance of this topic for federal policymakers. The federal government would appear to have legitimate concerns about two aspects of this topic. First, if students who fail a minimum competency test are not provided the opportunity to acquire the skills they lack through appropriate remediation programs and are then issued a second-class degree (such as a certificate of attendance) instead of a diploma, they are being penalized. In a society where education is used for credentialing, such second-class degrees could seriously jeopardize their future opportunities for employment or further education, and there will likely be subsequent governmental service costs. The second area of concern is the extent to which remedial activities are supported with federal

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*This percentage includes only students in states where there is now a statewide graduation requirement; other students are subject to district programs. For example, 26 of the 28 cities in the Council of Great City Schools have MCT programs that have direct effects on students, and 16 of these 26 cities are not in states that had programs meeting the criteria for inclusion in the study (Council of Great City Schools, September 1979).

funds. Based on the amount and source (e.g., ESEA Title I) of federal monies being used for MCT remediation, the federal government might consider specifying in more detail the extent to which this is permissible and how the monies should be used.

Organization of the Report

The remainder of this report has been divided into three chapters. The next chapter, Chapter Two, presents our approach to conducting this study and includes sections on study issues, state and district site selection, and data collection. Chapter Two also describes the current status of MCT programs in all 50 states. Chapter Three provides brief descriptions emphasizing MCT-related remediation activities of the MCT programs in each of the states and districts selected for the study's sample. Chapter Four, the final chapter of this report, summarizes the information available to address the major study issues.

CHAPTER TWO

STUDY DESIGN

The topics addressed in this section include a general overview of our approach to this study and specific discussions on site selection and data collection. The site selection section includes a summary of the status of MCT programs in all 50 states.

Overview of the Approach

The study focused on four questions concerning the provision of remedial services related to MCT programs. The four questions are:

- To what extent do students who fail the first administration of an MCT also fail retests?
- Are MCT-related remedial services available in states with currently implemented MCT programs?
- What are the funding levels and sources for MCT-related remediation?
- To what extent does funding for remedial activities for students who fail MCTs affect funding for other programs?

The purpose of the study was <u>not</u> to judge the effectiveness of different remedial programs nor, for that matter, to judge MCT programs themselves. Rather, our intent was to address the following general question: for students who fail MCTs, are remedial programs offered to help them pass on subsequent attempts, and, if so, who is paying for those programs?

Three specific concerns were paramount in designing our approach. First, a variety of testing programs have been labeled as MCTs. Accordingly, we imposed

two definitional limits: 1) the testing program had to have direct effects on students*, and 2) the testing program should include a focus on students in secondary schools.

Second, even within our limited definition, there are hundreds of MCT programs across the nation. Thus, a pragmatic way of selecting programs for study had to be devised. We decided to focus only on MCT programs which are required by states. Even though locally established programs can be found in all states, by limiting our study to statewide programs, most of the affected students are still included and, practically, state data are more readily available than those generated from local programs.

Third, our preliminary reviews of state MCT program descriptions suggested that testing programs and associated remediation efforts vary widely even within states with statewide programs. Thus, we determined that data collection should focus on specific districts within selected states. Further, even though preliminary telephone interviews to a few districts suggested that some of the information needed to address the study issues could be collected by telephone, site visits would also be necessary for us to gain sufficient information to understand local programs fully.

In summary, our approach included three major components. First, only MCT programs meeting specified criteria would qualify for consideration in this study. Second, we would focus on statewide programs to take advantage of the relative wealth of documentation available. Third, within the states selected

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*Direct effects on students would include, for example, a requirement to pass an MCT in order to receive a regular diploma or to be promoted to the next grade. MCT programs designed to lead to "curriculum revisions" or "program improvements" which may have indirect effects on students were not, therefore, included in this study.

for the study, we would collect data from several districts through site visits or telephone interviews.

Site Selection and Data Collection

Our overall approach to this study required us first to select state MCT programs for inclusion in our sample. Then, within the chosen states, districts were to be selected for detailed data collection. Because of the importance of our site selection procedures in this study, they are discussed in detail in this section.

Selection of States

We adopted strict criteria for selecting state MCT programs* for inclusion in our sample. Although as many as 39 states have been included on lists of MCT states, a cursory review of the programs shows they have little in common beyond being on the same lists. For this study we wished to investigate only those state programs which shared important characteristics and which, further, could actually provide us with useful data.

Three criteria were used to select states:

- The MCT program had to be implemented on a statewide basis;
- The MCT program had to have been already begun; and
- The MCT program had to have direct effects on secondary school students.

Application of these three criteria resulted in the selection of 13 states: Arizona, California, Delaware, Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Utah, Vermont, and Virginia. The following narrative describes the application of the criteria.

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*We have used the term "minimum competency testing" (or MCT) program as a general label in this report. It should be noted, however, that few of the states actually use that term to describe their programs.

Statewide implementation. The first criterion for selection was whether or not the state had an MCT program which was implemented on a statewide basis. Use of this criterion eliminated three categories of states: 1) those that have no state requirements for any MCT programs, even though districts may be permitted to establish local programs; 2) those which leave decisions on implementing the MCT program up to each local district; and 3) those with a competency testing requirement applicable to all districts, but which permit each district to determine how the MCT results will be used. Seventeen states fell into one of these three categories and, thus, were not included in this study.

- No state requirement. Eight states (Alaska, Hawaii, Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and West Virginia) do not have a state MCT requirement; i.e., neither the legislature nor the state board has required the imposition of an MCT program. However, districts in these states have not been precluded from establishing their own programs; for example, well-known MCT programs are present in (among others) Anchorage, Alaska; Bettendorf, Iowa; St. Paul, Minnesota; and Kanawha County, West Virginia.

- District option on implementation. Colorado and Idaho have MCT programs; however, district participation is locally determined. Furthermore, each of these two states has its own unique requirements which must be met before a district can participate in the state program. In Colorado, the legislature has required that any district adopting an MCT program must use student results as a graduation requirement and that students failing the MCT must be provided appropriate remediation. Idaho's state board requires participating districts to use a state-adopted test. Further, districts must agree that, by 1982, the test results will be used as the basis for awarding special recognition (a state board seal) on the diplomas of students who pass.

- District option on uses. Seven states (Connecticut, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, and Washington) require districts to participate in their MCT program but allow districts to determine how the results are to be used. In each of these states at least some districts have implemented MCT programs which have direct effects on secondary students. For example, Gary, Indiana, has had a program in effect since 1977 which requires high school students to pass tests in reading, math, language, and speech in order to graduate. Other districts in these states may use the results as an overall performance report card, and still others may not use the results at all.

Program begun. The second criterion used for selecting states was whether or not the MCT program was sufficiently far along in its implementation to justify drawing conclusions about it. Minimum competency testing is a relatively new venture for states, and consequently, state plans and intentions are subject to rapid and frequent change. Some states which have experimented with MCT programs on a trial basis have decided not to implement; in other states, scheduled implementation has been cancelled, or the program has been substantially revamped before going into effect. Thus, including such "potential" MCT programs in the study was judged likely to provide us with a misleading picture of the range of MCT programs.

Legislatures or state boards of education in 14 states have authorized statewide MCT programs that have yet to be fully implemented. However, some of these states are closer to full implementation than others: in six of the states, only preliminary activities (e.g., planning or pilot testing) have taken place; in five states, full implementation is scheduled in the next few years; and, in three states, the MCT programs are now partially implemented.

- Preliminary activities. Six states (Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Wyoming) have conducted preliminary activities that could lead to full MCT program implementation. Illinois and Kansas are piloting MCT with the intent of analyzing the results before going ahead. Maine conducted a similar trial in 1978, but has not yet taken further action on implementation. Both Ohio and Wisconsin have done some planning for MCT, but neither state has decided to implement a program. In 1977, Wyoming completed plans for implementing an MCT program which would have required students to pass district tests for graduation; however, the program has not been implemented, and there is no schedule for doing so.

- Scheduled implementation. In five states (Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Nevada, and Tennessee) MCT programs will be fully implemented in the next few years. Arkansas will implement an MCT program in 1982, though final decisions on test administration or usage of the results have yet to be made. Georgia's state board required a competency-based education program for all districts in 1979; statewide competency testing

tied to that program is scheduled to begin in 1981-1982. The Louisiana legislature established an MCT program in 1979, which will be implemented beginning with the second grade in 1980-1981, with one subsequent grade to be added each year thereafter. In Tennessee, beginning in spring 1981, members of the class of 1982 will undergo their initial testing on a statewide basis as part of their graduation requirements. Beginning in fall 1980, graduation-related MCTs will be administered to Nevada's class of 1982.

- Partial implementation. Three states (Alabama, Rhode Island, and South Carolina) are now implementing statewide MCT programs but have, as yet, not finally decided on how the results will be used. Alabama's program, which went into effect in spring 1980, is specifically designed to provide districts with student data for optional remediation, with a provision that sometime after 1981, students will have to pass a competency test to graduate from high school. Rhode Island's Board of Regents approved a statewide "program for excellence" in 1978, which includes a competency testing component; one possible future use of the tests will be to award special recognition to students who achieve standards of excellence. Currently, Rhode Island's MCT program is designed to provide information for program improvement. South Carolina is in the midst of a phased implementation of MCT. By 1985, high school students will take an MCT, but final decisions on how the results are to be used will not be made until 1989.

Direct effects on secondary students. The third criterion used for selecting states was whether or not the MCT programs had direct effects on secondary school students. Thus, states with secondary school MCT programs designed to provide information for "program improvement" or "curriculum revision" were excluded. Furthermore, the presence of vague references in MCT program descriptions concerning provisions for remediation or about goals concerning student mastery was judged to be an insufficient ground for including a state in this study; that is, any effects on students had to be mandatory.

- No direct effects. Six of the 19 states remaining after applying the first two criteria have MCT programs which do not have direct and mandatory effects on secondary school students: Kentucky, Mississippi, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Texas. The programs in Mississippi, Oklahoma and Pennsylvania are specifically designed to provide data for use in program improvement efforts and, thus, might be more properly termed statewide assessments

than MCTs. Nebraska's MCT program requires districts to assess student mastery of several basic skills, but does not require any penalties or rewards based on student performance; further, the program is directed toward elementary level students. Texas' program is designed to help determine, in combination with economic indicators, which students should be eligible for state-funded compensatory education programs. In Kentucky, students in selected grades take MCTs to identify those who may benefit from diagnostic testing and, at local discretion, participation in remedial programs.

Summary of state selection for this study. Thirteen states met the three criteria -- statewide implementation, current implementation, and direct effects on secondary school students -- and, thus, were included in our sample of states to be studied. These states are Arizona, California, Delaware, Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Utah, Vermont, and Virginia. The other 37 states were not included because they failed to meet at least one of the three criteria.

Selection of Districts

States were one focus of this study; districts in sampled states were another. District-level data were considered to be important for two reasons. First, many states require districts to implement and carry out local MCT program activities within general state guidelines; thus, data from districts in such states were necessary to expand upon sketchy state-level information. Second, even in states where a single MCT program is imposed on all districts, our preliminary investigation suggested 1) some districts were likely to be doing more testing than required and 2) remedial activities and funding levels appeared to vary widely.

We did not use rigid criteria to select districts. For one reason, states were our primary data units, not districts. For another, the level of effort for this study simply could not support even the least rigorous sampling plan

with an aim toward generalizability. This does not mean that districts were selected on a "catch-as-catch can" basis; three general factors were considered. First, at least one district in each of the 13 sampled states was selected. In larger states (e.g., California), multiple districts were chosen. Second, districts in which remedial programs were likely to be of relatively greater concern were selected. Practically speaking, this meant choosing rural or urban districts; suburban (i.e., "wealthier") districts were largely ignored because we expected that few students in such districts would fail the MCTs, an expectation supported by the available data.

A third factor, practicality, did not affect district selection directly but did help determine which districts were selected for visits rather than telephone interviews. Districts were selected for visits that were representative of major state MCT program patterns, and other site visits were scheduled to take advantage of on-site data collection scheduled for other NTS/EPDC studies. All in all, 23 districts were selected. Site visits were conducted to 13 of them, and telephone interviews were conducted with staff in the others. The number of districts selected per state ranged from one to three.

Data Collection

Three data collection strategies were employed for this study: 1) collection and review of background information; 2) on-site and telephone interviews with district personnel; and 3) follow-up telephone interviews in selected states.

Collection and review of background information. The initial task involved synthesizing the ample literature about MCT programs related to the study questions. Even though relatively little has been written directly concerning MCT-related remediation, the review process was important for helping to select

state and district sites and for determining which questions to ask where. The available literature on MCT programs was found to offer occasionally inconsistent information; for example, definitions of what constitutes an MCT program vary among authors and, further, even the descriptions of the same state's activities were sometimes at variance. Thus, early in this study we telephoned personnel in most of the states to verify our perceptions of their MCT programs and collect additional information prior to selecting states for our sample.

On-site and telephone interviews with district personnel. This data collection activity was geared to obtaining specific information concerning the remedial programs offered by the district. Although the interviews were on-the-record, all personnel and their districts were assured confidentiality and were informed that information obtained would be used primarily to illustrate their state's practices. The interviews were informal with questions structured by the nature of the state program.

Follow-up telephone interviews in selected states. As a final data collection activity, state department personnel were called on a selected basis to verify some of the information obtained from the districts when it was inconsistent with our expectations. In a few cases, calls were made to obtain information about new developments in their MCT programs. Further, all 13 states were contacted near the end of the study to obtain the latest available information about failure rates, remediation requirements, and funding for remediation.

CHAPTER THREE

MINIMUM COMPETENCY TESTING AND REMEDIATION

No two of the MCT programs included in this study are alike. They differ along such dimensions as what grade levels are tested and when, what skill areas are assessed, how the results are used, whether remedial services are required by the state, who pays for remediation, and the extent to which data are available to judge the effectiveness of their remedial activities. For example, in eight of the 13 states, the state has required that remedial services be provided for all students who fail the MCT, but only four of those eight states have made new state monies available to districts to pay for those services.

This chapter provides brief descriptions of the 13 state MCT programs; each state description includes information about relevant LEA activities. Tables 1 and 2 present a summary of state program characteristics; Table 1 provides basic descriptive information about program implementation, and Table 2 presents several specific characteristics of the testing programs.

Thirteen State MCT Programs

Arizona completed implementation of its MCT program in 1978. In 1972, the state legislature set up a competency-based education program which required that districts implement procedures to insure that students meet minimum standards prior to promotion from the eighth grade and for high school graduation. In 1976, the state board began the implementation of this policy by requiring all districts to initiate local programs to assess student performance in the areas of reading, writing, and computation; by 1978, most districts had implemented

Table 1.
Summary of 13 State MCT Programs — Program Implementation

	SOURCE AND DATE OF STATE MANDATE		DATE OF COMPLETED IMPLEMENTATION	LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBLE FOR STANDARD SETTING		USE OF THE PROGRAM					SOURCES OF REMEDIATION FUNDING	
						STUDENTS						
	Legislature	State Board		State	District	Graduation	Special Recognition	Promotion	Mandatory Remediation	Program Improvement	State	Local
Arizona	1972		1978		X	1978		X				X
California	1976		1979		X	1981			X			X
Delaware		1976	1979		X	1981					X	X
Florida	1976		1977	X		1979			X		X	X
Maryland	1975		1978	X		1982			X			X
New Jersey	1976		1977	X		1985			X	X	X	X
New Mexico		1976	1979	X	X		1981		X			X
New York		1975	1977	X		1979			X		X	X
North Carolina	1977		1978	X		1980			X		X	X
Oregon		1976	1976		X	1978						X
Utah		1977	1979		X	1980						X
Vermont		1975	1977		X	1981						X
Virginia	1976		1979	X		1981			X	X	X	X

Table 2.
Summary of 13 State MCT Programs — Nature of the Testing Programs

	ASSESSMENT FOCUS		SKILL AREAS ASSESSED FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS									NUMBER OF TIMES STUDENT CAN TAKE TEST	ADMINISTRATION METHOD	
	Basic Skills	Functional Skills	Reading	Math	Writing	Speaking	Communications/ Language Arts	Social Studies	Career Development	Consumerism	Other		Pencil/ Paper	Other
Arizona	X		X	X	X							LEA Option	LEA Option	LEA Option
California	X		X	X	X							4	LEA Option	LEA Option
Delaware		X	X	X	X							2	LEA Option	LEA Option
Florida	X	X	X	X	X		X					3	X	
Maryland	X	X	X	X	X			X	X		X	4	X	
New Jersey	X		X	X	X							4	X	
New Mexico		X	X	X	X							3	X	X
New York	X	X	X	X	X							9	X	
North Carolina	X		X	X	X							4	X	
Oregon	X	X	X	X	X	X	X					LEA Option	LEA Option	LEA Option
Utah		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	LEA Option	LEA Option	LEA Option
Vermont			X	X	X	X	X				X	LEA Option	LEA Option	LEA Option
Virginia	X	X	X	X			X					4	X	

appropriate programs. Beyond determining the general areas to be assessed, the state also requires that, for eighth grade promotion, local standards should reflect a sixth grade proficiency level in reading, writing, and computation. For high school graduation, students must reach the ninth grade level in reading. A 1978 survey by the SEA found that 202 out of 32,294 seniors failed to graduate because they did not meet local standards; this was less than a tenth as large as the group not graduating (2,407) because they did not meet regular requirements (Frahm, 1979). State-level data are not available on the number of students who failed on their initial attempt. In one Phoenix high school district, however, Covington (1979) reported that, over the past few years, about 10.3 to 12.5 percent of freshmen passed all tests on their first try, but nearly all students eventually met the requirements.

Remediation is not mandated by the state; provision of remedial services is a matter of local discretion. Further, no money is provided by the state for local remediation programs. The district visited in Arizona for this study does offer remediation for high school students who do not score at the fourth stanine or above on the standardized reading test used in the district to measure competence. The services available, while subject to general guidance from the district, are largely up to individual schools, with the most commonly provided services being elective communications labs and reading or English classes designed for basic skills instruction. All high schools in that district provide one or more of those options paid for by district general funds. In addition, two high schools have supplementary reading lab and ESL programs funded by Title I which provide some remedial assistance to eligible freshmen and sophomore students. The focus of this district has been less on after-the-fact remediation than on providing a sequence of developmental courses in the first two years of high school for all students to upgrade basic skills. The district's funds

support about 20 FTE positions for high school remediation; Title I funds at the high school level totaled about $180,000 last year, with much of that amount serving a "preventive" rather than a remedial function. The Title I labs have been reorganized somewhat to assist students in overcoming their specific reading problems which have been identified by standardized tests. The communications labs offered in the district are staffed by regular English department teachers who provide individualized instruction. Although these nine-week long labs are specifically designed for remediation, other students may enroll for advanced individualized communications instruction. Thus, according to instructional staff, the availability of elective options has not been seriously hampered by the addition of their new remedial responsibilities.

California has a relatively complex testing program including statewide assessments of elementary students and an "early-out" test for high school students. The MCT program itself, the proficiency assessment program, is only one part of this system; it was established by legislation in 1976 to serve as a graduation requirement for the classes of 1981 and thereafter. The MCT legislation requires the state board to supply sample performance indicators in reading, writing, and computation to districts, but leaves the responsibilities of setting specific standards and how to measure attainment of them to the districts.

Several districts in the state, most notably Los Angeles and Bakersfield, have already begun requiring satisfactory performance on MCTs as a graduation requirement. In Los Angeles, about 550 of 46,000 seniors (1.2 percent) in the class of 1979 were denied diplomas because they had not passed the district's reading test; on their first attempt, about one-third of those 46,000 students had not passed the test. In Bakersfield, four students out of the 1978 graduating class of 3,300 were denied diplomas because they did not meet the competency

requirements. A recent survey conducted by the state department suggests, however, that failure rates for the class of 1981 may be substantially higher. About one-half of the districts in the study reported that 30 percent or more of the students in the class of 1981 had not yet met all standards as of fall 1979 (California State Department of Education, 1980). In addition, in Los Angeles, first-time failure rates on the newly implemented mathematics and writing tests have been several times higher than those obtained on the earlier reading test (Lansu, 1980).

Though required by the legislature, remediation is a local responsibility. The state does reimburse districts for the costs of notifying parents of MCT failure. Even though these costs are borne by individual schools, however, the reimbursement goes to the district's general fund. In the two districts visited, responsibility for providing remedial services was assigned to the schools. In one case the district required schools to purchase remediation kits tied to the objectives being tested out of their regular materials budgets, even though the district could not require that the kits actually be used. In the other district, district-wide committees have developed guides for counselors and principals addressing the tested proficiencies, but their use is optional. Data were not available at the district level which would allow a determination of how many students were actually engaged in remedial programs or whether the remedial programs were having a positive effect on performance.

The remedial programs at the school level in the two districts included learning labs supported by Title I, in-school pull-out programs supported by the school budget, and after-school programs operated, apparently, on a largely volunteer basis. To the extent schools were actually following district guidelines, all remediation was to be directly targeted at student weaknesses identified

by the tests. Estimates of funding levels for remediation were not available in either district.

Delaware's MCT program was established by the state board in 1977 following the initiation of "a system of goal-directed and performance-based instruction" resulting from board resolutions in 1976. Under this program the state has established performance requirements in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics which students must meet to graduate. The program was implemented initially during the 1979-80 school year for grades 9-12, with the graduation requirement first going into effect for the class of 1981. Mastery of the performance requirements is assessed locally, and measures may include teacher-made tests or classroom performance as well as standardized tests. A statewide test is administered to students in grade 11, but it is used only to monitor overall levels of performance. Data on student performance are kept by LEAs, and there is no requirement to report the data to the state. Thus, no statewide data are available on the current mastery levels of members of the class of 1981 or on the extent to which mastery attainment has increased.

The state does not require that remedial services be provided to those students who fail to demonstrate mastery, though remediation is strongly encouraged as an integral part of the performance-based instructional system. To be sure, the state has provided some new financial resources for basic skills instruction which can be used for remediation at the discretion of the districts. From these resources districts receive one additional teacher or the equivalent in supplies, etc., for every 600 students in average daily attendance. Further, the SEA has passed on the bulk of an ESEA Title II grant to the districts to use in basic skills work. Districts are generally expected to rely on their own resources, particularly their Title I funds, for their efforts. A district

contacted for this study reported that their basic skills remediation was supported by state funds. Remediation takes place in small-group pullout instruction given by the state-supported basic skills teachers; in addition, an open-entry, open-exit summer program is offered which covers the areas of reading, math, and language arts. Both of these programs are new; no comparable remedial programs had existed at the secondary level prior to the implementation of the performance-based educational program. This district had no firm data available on the number of students who had yet to meet standards, but the district was beginning to compile these data.

Florida was one of the first states to begin actually testing students on a statewide basis for graduation. Florida is also the only state in which the courts have intervened with direct effects on program implementation. The state's MCT program, the Statewide Student Assessment Program, was authorized by the legislature in 1976, and Florida's Board of Education began to implement the testing program in 1977. Although the state administers tests at grade 3, 5, and 8, which can be used locally to make promotion decisions, two tests given at grade 11 are more relevant for this study. The first of these tests, the State Student Assessment Test (SSAT)-I, assesses basic skills; the second, SSAT-II, assesses functional skills. SSAT-II was challenged in the federal courts (Debra P. vs. Turlington, 1979), and its use as a graduation requirement was halted until 1983. Success on the areas assessed by SSAT-I is still required for graduation, though a student failing the test needs only to pass appropriate remedial courses to meet the requirement.

In the class of 1980, less than one percent of Florida's over 90,000 seniors failed to meet the SSAT-I requirement. The numbers of students not receiving diplomas probably would have been higher had the requirement to pass SSAT-II

been in effect; about 5,300 students (about six percent) in Florida's class of 1979 had not met the standards required on that test. Florida has relatively complete data on student performance on SSAT-II. For example, in 1977-78 about 76 percent of white eleventh graders (class of 1979) passed the math section, while about 23 percent of black students did so. The eleventh graders in the class of 1980 did better on the same test; the comparable passing rates were 83 percent and 40 percent for white and black students, respectively. Members of the class of 1979 showed improvements when retested as seniors: about 96 percent of white students passed, though the final passage rate for black students was less than 60 percent.

Remediation is required by the Florida legislation. In addition to locally sponsored remediation, the legislature appropriated $10 million in 1976-1977 and $26.5 million in 1978 from state funds for remedial programs. The 1978 increase appears to have resulted from the lower-than-expected passing rates on the initial test in October 1977. State funds are awarded to districts based on a formula which weights failure rates on all the state-level competency tests including those administered to elementary students. An additional $28.5 million was authorized for 1979, and districts were required by the legislature to provide a "grade 13" option for students who failed to graduate. This option would permit students to continue to take high school classes on an open-entry basis. State funds are spread across elementary and secondary schools; at least some districts, including Dade County, use all their state funds at the elementary level.

One Florida district we visited offered two remedial programs for high school students. State remedial funds (almost $2 million) paid for an "extended day" program for high school students. This program provides an additional

noncredit hour each day of small-group instruction focusing on basic reading and/or math skills. Further, district funds provided basic skills courses in language arts and mathematics in all high schools during regular school hours for students who have failed the grade 11 tests or who have been identified as being in danger of failing. These courses, which could be repeated as needed, provided elective credit. Students apparently prefer the after-school classes, according to district personnel, in order not to miss out on other elective opportunities. Although teachers in these remedial programs are technically free to teach what and how they want, district staff feel that all teachers largely follow district guidelines which are designed to target remediation to student weaknesses. Even though this district places much emphasis on remediation, they have placed even more on revising the curriculum to ensure that relevant skills are taught at all grade levels in a carefully sequenced order. Dramatic improvements in the district's rank on the grade 11 tests in the past three years were cited to justify their approach. The district was moving toward greater emphasis on basic skills prior to passage of the 1976 Act, but district staff suggested that the MCT program had provided them with added incentive to make desired changes.

Maryland has completed the first stages of implementation of its MCT program, though all components will not be in place until the mid 1980s. The phased implementation involves adding new skill areas to the program while, in parallel, a new basic skills curriculum (labeled "Project Basic") is implemented throughout the state. The class of 1982 faces a requirement to pass a functional reading test (for which testing began in 1978); the class of 1984 will also have a math test requirement; and, by the class of 1986, writing and a series of "life skills" also will be assessed. The program was initiated by legislative action

in 1976 and 1977, and the state board began implementing the program early in 1978. The planned implementation dates reflect a one-year delay in the original schedule due to problems with both the reading and math tests and because of legislative cuts in the funds used for test development.

Few results are available from the early test administrations, primarily because of problems with both the reading and math tests. In fact, the results of all except the first administration of the reading test in fall 1978 have been invalidated. On that test about 22 percent of Maryland's 61,000 ninth graders did not achieve a passing score. Three of Maryland's 24 districts already require students to pass competency tests similar to those planned for statewide use. In Caroline County, five students in the class of 1980 were denied diplomas because of this requirement. None of nearly 1800 students in Howard County failed to graduate, though about 100 had not passed all tests by the start of their senior year. In Baltimore City, about 1.9 percent of the 8336 students in the class of 1979 did not graduate because of the test requirement; for the 7887 students in the class of 1980, about 1.2 percent did not graduate for that reason. No data are available on their initial failure rates. It is interesting to note that, in 1979, about seven times more students in Baltimore City failed to graduate for other reasons (i.e., credit requirements) than because of MCT failure; in 1980, about 10 times more students failed to graduate because of other reasons.

Test results may be used by districts in making decisions about promotion or remediation, according to the legislation. The state board, however, has made remediation mandatory for students who fail, though no state funds are available to support remedial services. Maryland does provide funds for implementing the parallel curricular revision effort, Project Basic. A local district

contacted for this study reported that local funds are used to support remedial activities generally, though for special education students about half the funds are federal. In this district, the funds support a reading resource teacher in each school in addition to special remedial reading classes. Remedial programs were offered to secondary students in the past in this district, but staff reported that the services were now more directly targeted to weaknesses identified by the state tests. Staff also suggested that Project Basic was having a major impact on the district's curriculum; the MCT program, as a component of Project Basic, was not seen as having major effects in and of itself.

New Jersey's MCT program is in transition. A major component is being added to its current focus on identifying students for required remedial services; the new component will require members of the class of 1985 to pass an MCT for graduation. The program, established by legislative action in 1976, is designed to target remedial services to students and to provide state-level policymakers with data for program improvement. Under this program, secondary students are administered the Minimum Basic Skills Test at grades 9 and 11, and students who do not achieve state-determined standards on the spring-administered tests are to be provided remediation targeted to their deficiencies beginning in the following fall semester. The graduation requirement was added by the New Jersey legislature in 1979. To implement this requirement, testing will begin for ninth graders in the spring of 1982, and members of that class of 1985 will have to pass tests in reading, writing, and arithmetic to graduate with a regular diploma.

No new state funds are provided for remediation under the current program; however, existing state compensatory education funds are available for this purpose. The state compensatory education funds are allocated to districts on

the basis of scores on the Minimum Basic Skills Test. Districts are also expected to use their own resources and Title I funds to provide remedial services. For fall 1979, 16 percent of over 98,000 twelfth grade students who had been tested as eleventh graders qualified for mandatory remediation in math, and about 10 percent qualified in reading. Among tenth graders (tested as ninth graders), about 20 percent of nearly 109,000 students qualified for reading remediation, and a similar percentage qualified in math. For the graduation requirement to be implemented beginning in 1982, no additional funding for remedial programs has been planned by the state.

In an urban district in New Jersey, district staff reported using Title I, state compensatory education, and local funds (in that order) to meet students' remedial needs. At the high school level these funding sources support two reading and two math specialists in each school. Instruction generally takes place in special remedial classes (for elective credit); for students with very low scores, special reading and math centers are available. Aides are provided in all remedial classes. Although remedial programs were present prior to the initiation of the MCT program, staff suggested that the use of the Minimum Basic Skills Test scores had made it possible to target remedial activities more effectively. No information was available from this district about the effects of MCT-related remediation funding on other programs.

New Mexico has implemented a two-level MCT program as part of the New Mexico Basic Skills Plan based on state board resolutions passed in 1976 and 1977. At one level, the state administers a New Mexico-specific form of the Adult Performance Level Survey* to all tenth graders; at the other level, the

*The Adult Performance Level Survey (APL) was developed originally at the University of Texas; a current version is marketed by American College Testing. The APL is purported to be a measure of adult functional competencies.

state requires districts to test the writing skills of students through locally designed and administered exercises. Students who pass both of these tests are awarded a diploma with a "proficiency endorsement"; those that fail one or both but meet other graduation requirements receive a standard diploma. This program directly affects the class of 1981, and testing began in February 1979. As of the end of their junior year (i.e., after two chances) about 94 percent of the state's students in the class of 1981 had passed the Adult Performance Level test. (About 80 percent of the students passed on the initial administration.) No data are available from the state on the number of students passing the local writing tests.

Student failure on either test is intended to lead to required remediation, according to the state board resolution, but New Mexico has not appropriated state funds to pay for any remedial services for this purpose. Districts, therefore, are required to find the funds necessary to support the remedial efforts. An urban district reported that Title I funds were used in eligible schools, but most support comes from local funds. The local funds used reflect a redirection of available "discretionary" funds from other potential programs. In the district, remedial services were available to all students who failed either test component. Most students, about 88 percent, met all standards on their first try; remediation had helped reduce the failure rate on the second test to about two percent for the class of 1981, with one test administration remaining. Secondary-level remediation was essentially a new effort brought about by the MCT. Schools provide APL-related remediation through labs staffed by teachers and aides; for each student needing remediation, an individualized study plan is developed. Writing test remediation is the responsibility of all individual English teachers as part of their instructional activities. No direct

effects on other programs were reported to be caused by the need to provide remediation, but potential new programs were indirectly affected because some discretionary funds were now being used for remedial activities, and district staff suggested that the MCT program had spurred a reexamination of the entire curriculum.

New York's MCT program is undergoing two major shifts: 1) the focus of the tests is moving toward basic, rather than functional, skills, and 2) the standards are being made "tougher." Both the original program and the shifts reflect decisions made by the Board of Regents. Under the original program, passed in 1975, high school students had to demonstrate minimal competencies in applications of reading, math, and writing on state-administered tests. This requirement was first imposed on the class of 1979. About 550 of the quarter million New York seniors in that class did not graduate because of this requirement. (This constituted less than one percent, compared to over 20 percent who failed on their initial attempt.) At the same time, over 13,000 failed to receive diplomas because "standard" graduation requirements were not met (e.g., number of credit hours). The new competency tests are intended to be more difficult, and apparently they are: for example, in the first administration, about 60 percent of the state's 10th graders failed the new reading test. These new tests are a requirement for students graduating after June 1, 1981.

According to the program approved by the Regents, all students who fail the MCT or state tests given at lower grade levels are to be provided with remedial instruction. Although New York has not provided new funds for MCT-related remediation, funds are available for districts from Title I and existing state compensatory education programs to help meet remedial needs. Nonetheless, most of the financial responsibility falls on districts; in fact, the Regents have

specifically suggested that electives and extra-curricular activities should be cut if students are not getting the basics. In short, districts are expected to meet student needs for remediation out of the current resources available to them.

New York City, with 5200 members of the class of 1979 having met all graduation requirements except passage of the MCT with one administration to go, set up a crash remedial program in May 1979, at a cost of $200,000, to help those students before their class' final test date in June 1979. The New York City schools also located volunteer tutors to help these students. Further, the Board of Regents approved a summer remediation program in 1979 for students denied a diploma; this program was largely the result of pressure from New York City.

Staff in an urban district visited for this study reported that nearly all funds spent for remediation came from state compensatory education funds and Title I. The staff pointed out that many, if not most, of the students receiving these remedial services would have received supplementary services even if there were no MCT program. District staff reported that, while remedial activities were now being targeted directly at student deficiencies identified by the MCT, the district's emphasis was not being placed only on bringing the identified students up to the minimum but also included a concern with improving the general educational achievement of those students. Further, in this district, a general decline in revenues has tended to push education toward the basics at the expense of many elective programs; the presence of the MCT program has reinforced that tendency.

North Carolina's MCT program requires high school students, beginning with the class of 1980, to pass tests of reading and math in order to graduate. This program was initiated by the legislature in 1977, and testing began in fall 1978. Standards were determined and tests were selected by a state-level competency test commission established by the legislation. A writing test will be added to the statewide battery in fall 1981. Students in the class of 1980 have had four chances to pass the reading and math tests; the initial administration's failure rate of about 16 percent was reduced to less than 2 percent who did not receive diplomas because of the MCT program (or less than 2000 out of 81,000 seniors) with one final summer test to go. Other data available from the state suggest that students in subsequent classes are passing at higher rates on their first tries; for example, about 12 percent of the class of 1981 failed their initial test. Minority students have not done as well as whites on the MCT. About 99.3 percent of the white students in the class of 1980 had met the MCT requirement after four test administrations while the comparable figure for black students was 92.3 percent.

North Carolina's legislation requires the provision of remedial services to students who fail the MCT. A study conducted by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction during the 1978-1979 school year reported over 40,000 students (nonduplicated count) had received some remediation related to the competency test. As only about 13,000 students actually failed one or both parts of the MCT on its initial administration, substantial effort is apparently directed to students who are judged likely to fail.

North Carolina's Assembly appropriated $7.75 million for remediation in 1978-1979, and about $13 million a year for 1979-80 and 1980-81. State remediation funds are awarded to districts in proportion to the number of students

who fail or are judged likely to do so. Further, districts use other funding sources as well; for example, one of the three districts visited for this study also used Title I funds for remediation. In addition, about $2 million in CETA/YETP* funds supported basic skills remediation in 50 (of 145) districts during the 1979-1980 school year.

Visits to several districts in North Carolina suggested some variation in the way remedial services are provided and funded. One district provided eight remedial teachers for its six high schools. Although two of the teachers were funded by ESEA Title I, two by CETA Title IV (YETP), and four by state remedial funds, all of the classes were considered to be similar by district and building staff though the CETA-funded classes did spend about a day per week on such employability skills as filling out job applications. All emphasized individual instruction in a standard classroom setting, with relatively small class sizes. The only significant difference among the classes involved assignment of students, with participants in the CETA or Title I classes having to meet the eligibility requirements of those programs. Although some of the instruction offered in this district's remedial classes was general, most was targeted to student needs identified by the MCT or by other state tests given in earlier grades.

In a second district with one high school, state remedial funds made it possible to hire an additional teacher for remediation; this freed one member of the regular staff to teach advanced courses. Thus, state remedial funds were indirectly supporting advanced classes in this district, but, as district staff pointed out, the state funds also made it possible to devote more attention to

*Comprehensive Employment and Training Act/Youth Employment and Training Programs (P.L.95-524, Title IV (A)(3)).

the specific remedial needs of their students. This school used a lab setting with a focus on mathematics instruction.

In the third district, state remedial funds supported both a math and a reading teacher for labs at the district's two high schools. The district received a supplementary grant from the state in February 1980 to fund aides to provide one-on-one instruction to students who had failed more than once. In addition, district funds provide four teachers and aides for compensatory classes in junior high schools. In general, staff in this district felt the existence of state funds had made it possible to continue their regular program while also meeting the extensive remedial needs added by the MCT program.

Oregon's state board initially adopted the notion of competency testing in 1972, though it was 1976 before the board stipulated the details of Oregon's Minimum Standards Program. The state required districts to certify that high school students, beginning with the class of 1978, met locally set standards in basic skills to graduate. Further, districts are required to develop standards for "personal development, social responsibility, and career development" and certify that students have met those standards for members of the class of 1981 to graduate. Oregon has placed more emphasis than other states on applied performance testing, although many districts have adopted commercially available pencil and paper tests for the basic skills. In many districts and schools, certifying that competencies have been met has been left up to the classroom teacher. One of the major problems faced by the Oregon program is how to treat students who transfer across district lines; "full-faith-and-credit" is not always granted for previously passed competencies even when they are quite similar in focus. No data are reported to the state specifying the numbers of students not graduating because of failure to meet the competency standards.

The feeling of state department personnel, however, is that many more students failed to graduate because of insufficient credit hours than because of the competency requirement.

Providing remedial services to students not meeting local standards is not required by the state, nor are any state funds made available for this purpose. Districts visited do provide remediation out of general funds, but remediation per se was considered less important by the district personnel interviewed than providing a well-articulated sequence of instruction throughout the curriculum which matches the local standards. Since the state's competency-based education approach presumes step-by-step progress for students (an approach very compatible with having to meet large numbers of objectives), remediation often involves little more than a within-class review of several instructional units followed by a retest or other, often informal, method of certifying that the standard has been met. In districts where large-scale testing is used, generally the larger districts, remediation is often provided in more formal settings such as labs or regular classrooms. In the districts we visited, however, informal remediation was much more common. All staff interviewed in each of the districts suggested that the change toward competency-based instruction had had marked effects on their district's curriculum in general, but specific effects on particular programs were not noted.

In Utah the MCT program relies on districts to develop or choose tests or other methods to measure competency levels and to set standards. This program was mandated by the state board in 1977, and meeting these local standards is a graduation requirement for the class of 1980. The state stipulated that the districts must assess competencies in the following areas: reading, writing, speaking, listening, computation, democratic governance, consumerism, and problem

solving. Although schedules and grade levels for testing are at local discretion, the state has suggested beginning the testing process at the eighth grade. Students who do not pass prior to their class' graduation date receive a "certificate of progress" which includes a record of competency achievement. The student may continue being tested until passing, at which time a diploma will be awarded. No data are available from the state concerning the number of students denied diplomas in the class of 1980 because of the MCT requirement, nor were specific data on failing rates available from the districts contacted, though staff in those districts did report that virtually all students had met the requirements.

The state does not require districts to provide remediation, nor does the state provide specific funds to assist districts that wish to offer remediation to students who fail. The state does permit redirection of funds from several state categorical programs for summer school to be used for remediation at district discretion. The interviews we conducted with district personnel indicated their districts were offering remedial services, though some personnel indicated that the short timeline for full implementation of the MCT program had made the development of appropriate remedial courses a somewhat haphazard process. One district was just beginning to think about systematic remediation geared to the tested areas; that district was applying for an ESEA Title II grant to help develop such a program. A related problem is that not all districts have specific courses or curriculum units which match the areas to be tested; in those districts, curriculum development efforts have superceded the development of remedial programs. In this sense, district staff suggested that the MCT program was having direct effects on other programs though it was too soon to tell the extent to which the need to provide local resources for MCT-related remediation would also have effects. For the most part, some form of remediation is usually

available, and it is paid for by district general funds. One district staff member suggested the cost of providing remedial services was an explicit factor in determining the cut-off levels on the test. Further, the same individual reported that the district would have to direct funds to meet MCT-related remedial needs that could have been used for new programs designed to address the district's own priorities, priorities not included in the state's list of competency areas.

Vermont's MCT program, the "Basic Competency Program," established by state board action in 1975, is to serve as a graduation requirement for the class of 1981. Assessment began in the 1977-78 school year. Members of that class will have to demonstrate mastery of 26 state-established objectives in language arts and 25 in mathematics to graduate with a regular diploma. In addition, beginning with the class of 1983, students also will have to meet standards on 15 "reasoning" objectives. Measuring the levels of mastery and setting the mastery standards with regard to the objectives was explicitly left to districts by the state board. Vermont appears to be unique in that mastery at one time does not end testing on the particular objective; student records are to show when the objective was first mastered as well as all subsequent dates and results. Districts are required to report to the state annually the number of students who have mastered each competency. Data available as of the end of the 1979-80 school year indicate that all but a small percentage of the students in the class of 1981 have now met the standards appropriate for them.

Providing remedial services to those students who were tested but did not demonstrate mastery is a decision left to the discretion of each local district. The state neither requires those services to be provided nor makes funds available

for that purpose. Staff in a district contacted for this study reported that their remedial activities are funded primarily with local funds, although some Title I funds are used, and the state supplies funds for special education students. By spring 1980, about seven percent of the district's students in the class of 1981 had not met the language arts requirements, and less than six percent had not met the math requirement. The district supplies three teachers and six aides for reading and one teacher and aide for math, with students allowed to take two remedial classes per day. Further, for students for whom the classwork is not sufficient, an individualized remediation plan is developed which can include one-on-one instruction, after-school tutoring, or additional class work. These remedial activities reflected a new commitment by the district; information was not available on whether these new activities had affected other programs.

Virginia has implemented an MCT program involving both statewide testing and district-level assessment of student achievement. The Graduation Competency Testing Program, authorized by the legislature in 1976, and amended in 1978, requires students to pass statewide tests in reading and math as well as meeting local standards on communications skills, citizenship, and skills related to qualifications for further education or employment to be awarded regular diplomas. For the local assessment areas, districts can develop their own assessment methods such as successful completion of a course. The class of 1981 is the first that must meet these requirements, and members of that class were first tested in fall 1978. After three of their four chances to pass, about three percent of the 75,000 students in the class (or about 2,000 students) had not passed both parts of the state test. On their first attempt, about 13 percent of the members of this class did not pass.

The legislation requires that remedial services be provided for students who fail, but state funds were not provided for this purpose until 1980. At that time the legislature developed a funding formula for allocation of state compensatory education funds which took scores on statewide basic skills achievement tests into account. (Districts with higher percentages of students two grade levels or more below on the test receive relatively greater proportions of the funds.) One district visited for this study received enough additional funding as a result of the new financial assistance to fund two new teachers in each of its eight secondary schools. These 16 teachers were specifically designated to work with the approximately 900 students in the district who had either not met the MCT standards or had scored two grade levels or more below grade on standardized tests given in the eighth grade. The district has also redirected about $65,000 of its own funds toward remediation. As for federal funds, no Title I monies are used at the secondary level, and even though a local CETA youth program and an ESAA program involve secondary students, neither program is directly involved in remedial activities tied to the MCT. In most of the schools remediation is provided in regular classroom settings with low student-teacher ratios. Reading labs are used in all schools, and a math lab is used in one school. The district is conducting an evaluation of the relative effectiveness of the lab versus classroom approach, but data will not be available until 1981. District staff suggested that the new state aid for remediation had roughly balanced the districts' financial loss that was due to declines in enrollment. No particular effects were noted on other programs because of the need to provide funds for MCT-related remediation. The district had previously been providing some remediation and had emphasized attainment of basic skills prior to the initiation of the MCT requirement. But because of the new requirement, remediation was being more carefully targeted than in the past.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study was designed to provide information needed to address four major study questions. The information we collected is discussed in relation to each of those questions in this chapter, and a summary section concludes this report.

Study Questions

> To what extent do students who fail the first administration of an MCT also fail retests?

The limited data available on failure rates are not conclusive, but several trends are evident. First, even though large percentages of students may fail on the initial MCT administration, those percentages are cut substantially by the time of the final test administration. For example, about 16 percent of North Carolina's class of 1980 failed one or both parts of the state's MCT in 1978; by spring 1980, however, less than two percent of the class of 1980 had not met this requirement. In New York, initial failure rates of over 20 percent were cut to less than one percent for the class of 1979. Virginia's class of 1981, which had an initial failure rate of about 18 percent, had only about three percent who had not yet passed with one administration to go. Parallel patterns can be found in all states and districts where data are available. Moreover, it appears that many more students fail to graduate for such traditional reasons as insufficient credit hours than because of failure to pass an MCT.

Second, in general the failure rates for minority students are higher than those for white students on initial and subsequent administrations. Partially as a result of their higher failure rates on the initial administration, minority youth tend to have their failure rates reduced by larger percentages on later administrations though notable gaps remain between the final passing rates of white and minority youth. In North Carolina, for example, 34 percent of black students failed the math component of the state's MCT in 1978; that rate was eventually reduced to about three percent. The comparable figures for white students were seven percent and less than one percent.

A third trend was also observed: students in the first class subject to state MCT requirements have higher failure rates than do students in later classes. In Florida, first-time failure rates on the SSAT-II in 1977-78 were about 37 percent; in 1978-79, the initial failure rate was about 26 percent. In North Carolina, 16 percent of the members of the class of 1980 failed on their first try; about 12 percent of the class of 1981 failed the first time the MCT was administered to them.

State and local staff interviewed for this study advanced three explanations for the observed trends on failure rates. First, many students did not apply themselves seriously to trying to pass the MCT the first time around but began to do so after they failed or saw that others were failing. Second, remedial programs targeted at deficiencies identified by the tests were able to fill in specific knowledge gaps for many students. Third, greater emphasis on the material covered by the tests throughout the curriculum helped reduce knowledge gaps for later classes. Although this study design did not allow for systematically examining the relative importance of these explanations, we were particularly impressed by the frequency of comments about improvements in students' approaches

and attitudes to the test and by the efforts to provide specifically targeted remediation.

Although most students eventually meet their MCT requirements, one cannot be sanguine about the small percentages of students who do not. Even one or two percent of students on a nationwide basis constitutes a substantial number of students. Further, the actual failure rates in some states may turn out to be much higher than those observed in this study.* This study looked at MCT programs in just 13 states, some of which had no data on how many students had failed or were failing, or had dropped out. Finally, in the next few years more state programs are set to be implemented, and numerous local programs are now in place or planned. In short, even though this study found nearly all students remaining in school do eventually meet their MCT requirement, the universal nature of that finding is still very much in question.

*In the two largest states, New York and California, it is too early to tell how many students may be prevented from receiving a diploma because of an MCT requirement. California's students in the class of 1981 are the first to face the state's requirements on a statewide basis, and data from the state suggest that relatively high percentages (i.e., over 30 percent) in about half the districts have not yet done so. In New York, after June 1, 1981, students will face tougher MCT requirements; well over half of the students who took the new tests failed on their first attempt, an initial failure rate substantially higher than on the earlier New York test. As another example, in Florida, about six percent of the class of 1979 did not pass the state's functional literary test (SSAT-II) but were able to graduate because of a court decision delaying the implementation of that requirement.

Are MCT-related remedial services available in states with currently implemented MCT programs?

All districts included in this study provided remedial services to students who failed an MCT; most of the districts also provided remediation for students identified as being in danger of failing. In most of these districts, remedial programs had been offered prior to MCT implementation, but, spurred by MCT-related needs, remediation has now received a higher priority. Programs have become larger and, more importantly, remedial activities have been more directly targeted to the specific needs of individual students. At the same time, inadequate data were available in some districts to judge whether all students who needed services were in fact being served; it is possible that some students are still "falling through the cracks."

Even though all the districts provided remedial services, only eight of the 13 states included in this study required that those services be provided. The other five states (Arizona, Delaware, Oregon, Utah, and Vermont) do not require, though they encourage, districts to offer appropriate remediation to students who fail the state-required MCT.* To a great extent, whether remediation is required by the state is a function of the nature of the MCT program itself. In this regard we identified three general state MCT program patterns. First, seven states (Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, and Virginia) require all students to take and pass a statewide examination and meet state-established standards. This formal testing procedure is closely associated with the existence of such formal remedial programs as separate classes, labs, and

*It is interesting to note that states with MCT programs established by legislation are more likely to require remediation than are states with programs established by state board resolutions; six of seven legislative states require remediation, while only two of six state board states do so.

after-school activities. The second MCT pattern involves the use of local assessment instruments to measure competencies established at the state level. California, Delaware, Utah, and Vermont fit this pattern; in these four states, most remediation generally takes place in formally structured settings (such as special classes), although regular classroom reviews of material are also used. Two states, Arizona and Oregon, fit a third pattern; at the state level only general competency areas (e.g., "reading") have been specified. Districts are responsible for determining what particular competencies to assess and how. Remediation is generally informal in these states, taking place within regular classrooms with regular teachers.

One other factor, district size, appears to play a major role in determining the form remediation takes. Larger districts in the states in the second and third groups noted above tend to provide remedial services in settings outside the regular classroom (i.e., remediation is relatively formal); these districts also tend to use large-scale testing to assess student proficiencies.

Four potential problem areas related to the provision of remedial programs were noted during our meetings with district staff. First was a decline in opportunities to take elective courses for students required to take remedial courses. The most commonly implemented solution was to offer additional remedial classes during nonschool hours to allow students to receive both remedial services and their elective choices. The potential hardship such a selection posed for students who were unable to participate during nonschool areas was recognized by the districts, but no resolutions to this problem were noted.

Second, and closely related to the above, was a general decline in elective offerings. A few districts that received no additional state funds for required remediation (as is the case, for example, in districts in New York) occasionally

reported that the breadth of elective offerings had narrowed in recent years. Although none of those interviewed indicated that this pattern was due solely to MCT-related remediation (rather it was due to fiscal constraints), most suggested that the need to provide additional remediation had reinforced and strengthened this trend. The converse should also be noted. When new state monies were available to pay for the new remedial needs related to the MCT, local funds were often freed up to support other elective courses.

The third potential problem noted by those in the field was that of resegregation. Minority students are more likely than white students to fail MCTs and thus to be assigned to remedial classes. This problem was generally recognized in the abstract; even though relatively higher proportions of minority students were in the remedial classes offered, the benefits to the students were felt to outweigh any disadvantages. Most district staff who recognized this problem also were familiar with the court's finding in Debra P. vs. Turlington that such short-term resegregation can be permitted.

The final problem identified by district staff was how to pay for the remedial services. The next section describes how the states and districts have addressed this problem.

What are the funding levels and sources for MCT-related remediation?

The primary source of financial support for remedial services for students who fail minimum competency tests is a district's general funds. Only six of the states have either made new state monies available or redirected existing compensatory education funds to help districts meet their new remedial needs. Federal funds constitute a minor resource component except in isolated situations.

Delaware, Florida, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, and Virginia make state funds available to districts to help pay for remedial services tied to MCT. Delaware, Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia have made "new monies" available specifically earmarked for remedial services tied to MCT programs, while New Jersey and New York have allowed funds already targeted for compensatory education, including funds from Title I, to be used to meet the new remedial needs. Three other states, California, Maryland, and New Mexico, require districts to provide remedial services to students who fail but provide no state funds to help cover the costs of those services. On the other hand, Delaware does not require districts to provide remediation, but has made state funds available to assist districts in providing basic skills instruction at the secondary school level.

Among the 23 LEAs included in this study, nonlocal funds provided a major source of support to eleven. Not surprisingly these 11 districts were in the six states providing state support and/or allowing the use of Title I funds. Local funds also were used extensively in most of these 11 districts.

In the other 12 LEAs included in the study, district or school personnel are responsible for coming up with the needed resources. In seven of those 12

districts, the MCT program requires students to demonstrate mastery of locally determined objectives, often through normal classroom work; thus, remediation tends to be classroom based and is relatively informal and individualized. Staff in none of these districts found financing remediation to be a problem; in fact, providing remedial services was seen as a standard part of the instructional program and not, consequently, requiring specific funding. In the other five districts, formal tests are administered, and remediation tends to take place outside the regular classroom setting. In these districts, staff acknowledged having to scrape to meet their remedial program needs. Generally, their approach involved some redirection of local funds, some new local funds, and the use of some federal program funds. Redirection of local funds, which constituted the primary source of money, usually involved rearrangements of elective offerings. For example, in a Utah district, an elective advanced math class was being partially replaced by a remedial math elective, i.e., the advanced course was still being offered, but with fewer class sections available to students. In an Arizona district, high school English teachers were expected to staff nine-week reading labs once every two years in place of an additional elective. The labs, however, could include students doing advanced work as well as those needing remedial assistance. Another form of redirection was observed in a California district; there the LEA required all schools to purchase remediation materials packets out of the schools' regular materials budgets (though the LEA could not require the remediation packets to be used).

New local funds were generally not available to the districts to fund needed remedial activities. But most of the districts in this group did have some discretionary resources which could be used for remediation rather than for another new program. A Utah district, for example, was using some funds for

remediation that conceivably, according to LEA staff, could have been used in other priority areas such as expansion of an art lab.

The use of federal funds, while widespread, constituted the major source of financial support for remediation in only a few districts. Although the actual amount of federal funds being used for remediation could not be determined from this study design, the proportion was small relative to local and, where appropriate, state funds. The most commonly used federal funds came from ESEA Title I, with lesser amounts of CETA (primarily YETP, Title IV A3) and other ESEA program funds. In none of the districts visited did the use of Title I funds for secondary remediation programs constitute a redirection of funds from elementary programs. Rather, these Title I program funds had either been targeted to secondary schools prior to the MCT, or, if added later, were a response to other identified needs and provided MCT-related remediation only as a side benefit.

The use of Title I funds for MCT-related remediation carries with it several potential problems associated with the requirements of the law. Although the data were not collected which would permit a judgment of whether or not a particular Title I funds usage was in compliance, current district practices do raise questions in terms of the "required by law," "proportionate share," and "comparability" provisions of the current regulations for Title I.*

The "required by law" provision (§201.135) states that, "An LEA may not use Title I funds to provide services that the LEA is required to make available under (1) federal, state, or local law; or (2) a court order." Eight of the states in this study legally require that remedial services be provided to students who fail the MCT, and districts in five of them were using Title I funds

*The final regulations for 34 CFR Part 201, "Financial Assistance to Local Education Agencies for Children with Special Education Needs," were presented in the Federal Register, January 19, 1981, pp.5160-5190.

to help meet that requirement. Although §201.135 further suggests that a district will be presumed to be in violation only if it is using Title I funds to help meet a court order (none of the districts failed that test), a broader interpretation of the "required by law" provision could raise potential problems for these districts. Further, §201.142 states that "the LEA may use Title I funds to supplement its expenditures for compensatory education or other required services if the LEA can demonstrate that - without the use of Title I funds - it is fully meeting its obligations under state or local law." In at least one district, it should be noted, Title I provided the major funding share of MCT-related remediation. Perhaps the only conclusion that can be drawn is that use of Title I funds for MCT-related remediation raises complex and serious questions in terms of the "required by law" provision.

The "proportionate share" provision (§201.138) provides a formula which indicates "for each type of special programs ... the amount of funds that the LEA is obligated to provide, under that type of program, in Title I eligible school attendance areas and schools." An example offered suggests that if three-fourths of the students failing an MCT are in Title I attendance areas, then three-fourths of the state or local funds targeted for MCT-related remediation (i.e., a "proportionate" share) should be expended to benefit those students. This study found that districts included in the sample in all but five states were using Title I funds for MCT-related remediation and that state or local funds were also available in those districts which were targeted to those who had failed the MCT. Although the data we collected did not permit addressing adequately whether or not this provision is being met, questions are raised by a few examples of districts where Title I funds were used for remediation in Title I schools while other funds were largely directed elsewhere. In most

other cases, however, state and local funds were also being expended in schools located in Title I attendance areas, although it was not possible to calculate whether this was being done proportionately.

"Comparability" requires that "an LEA may receive Title I funds only if it uses state and local funds in project areas and in school attendance areas ... to provide services that, taken as a whole, are at least comparable to services being provided in school attendance areas in the LEA that are not receiving Title I assistance" (§201.112). That is, to the extent that the addition of state or local funds for MCT-related remediation affects the pupil-instructional staff ratio or average per pupil expenditure for instructional staff in Title I schools negatively in comparison to the average of other schools, the district is violating the comparability provision. This study did not collect data which would permit judgments in this area. Nonetheless, in the districts where state and local remedial funds are directed primarily at non-Title I schools, with Title I funding the services in eligible schools, there is certainly a risk that the comparability provision is not being met. This risk may be balanced, however, by a provision that state or local compensatory education program funds can be excluded from the comparability requirements if certain conditions are met (§201.118). These conditions include approval by the ED secretary or the state that the program is considered to be "similar to the Title I program for an LEA." We did not explore in depth whether this condition was met, but staff in the districts in question usually indicated that, "It was approved by the state." In short, while there may be no "comparability" problems, this study cannot say there are no problems.

CETA funds appear to play a major role only in North Carolina; about 15 percent of all "state" remediation funds come from YETP. In other states and

districts, while YETP might be funding some basic skills improvement programs in secondary schools, district staff tended to see the relationship to MCT remediation as peripheral. Other individual federal programs are even less frequently used, though a large number of programs do play a role. For example, ESEA Title IV-C funds had been used in several districts to develop remedial approaches; further, some districts reported use of "adopter" grant funds to implement Joint Dissemination Review Panel-approved programs they thought would be effective in teaching appropriate skills. One district reported having used Impact Aid funds (ESEA Title X) in the past to support a junior high remedial program.

How much money is being spent for remediation cannot be estimated across the states, or even within any one of them. The most complete data, as would be expected, are available from the six states that directly support remedial services. For example, for the 1979-80 school year, Florida appropriated $28.5 million. How much of this is actually spent by districts on MCT-related remediation for secondary students, rather than similar programs for elementary students, is unknown. As an illustration, Dade County apparently spends its state money at the elementary level. In addition, districts have also used some of their own resources; in one Florida district visited for this study, almost as much was spent on locally developed and supported programs as was supplied by the state.

More important than the total amounts are staff perceptions about whether the amounts are sufficient. Virtually all local personnel interviewed desired more money; at the same time, those same personnel were generally satisfied that they were already meeting local remedial needs related to the MCT. (The assertion that the needs were met was usually backed up by data showing how many students were now passing who had previously failed or how many more were now passing on

the first try.) Many personnel echoed one local administrator, however, who suggested, "If the state is going to do this (the MCT program), they should pay to pick up the pieces."

One interesting sidelight on remedial funding came from districts that were responsible for setting their own standards. In several of these districts, how high the standards were set was unabashedly determined, first, by how many students could be failed politically and, second, by how much money the district could afford for remediation.

To what extent does funding for remedial activities for students who fail MCTs affect funding for other programs?

Although the need to fund remedial activities does appear to affect funding for other programs at both the state and district levels, the effects are not uniform. Further, the data available to address this topic are not adequate to provide a detailed and complete response to the question.

Three general patterns were observed at the district level. First, in districts where states supplied a major portion of remedial funds, the effects of remedial program funding on other local programs were either negligible or even positive. For example, in one Florida district, state funds supported remedial activities during nonschool hours; thus, students were still able to take their regular electives, and the district was not placed in a position of having to substitute programs. In a North Carolina district, state funds supported an in-school remedial program; the extra FTE of instructional time made it possible to offer additional advanced courses as well as providing more remedial services. Second, in districts with a substantial remedial responsibility but without state support, the remedial needs were occasionally met by redirecting funds from elective offerings to remediation. For example, although the elective might still be available, it might not be offered as frequently or might have a larger class size. Such changes were not seen as being harmful by district staff, who felt that a full array of electives was still available. A more important source of funds in these districts was the small pool of "discretionary" money used to fund new programs. New priority programs were not being initiated in these districts; rather, those discretionary funds were targeted toward remediation. Third, in districts where MCT requirements could be met on

a relatively informal basis (e.g., by meeting class objectives), staff suggested there had been little effect on funding for other programs because remedial activities themselves were merely part of standard instructional practices.

At the state level, the major effect was indirect. That is, if states provided districts with remedial funds, then less money was available to support other initiatives. These opportunity costs are not a minor consideration; Florida has spent over $60 million on remediation in the past three years, and North Carolina has spent about $30 million.

Summary

Most of the students affected by the MCT graduation requirements in the states studied do eventually meet the requirement. Not all of them pass, however, and those that fail are disproportionately members of minority groups. Further, the extent to which drop-out rates are affected by MCT requirements is unknown.

Remedial services were being made available for the students who failed MCTs in all the districts included in the study. Relatively formal remedial programs (e.g., special pull-out instruction, math labs, or after-school sessions) were associated with MCT programs which were also relatively formal (e.g., statewide tests and state-established standards). Further, larger districts, regardless of the nature of the MCT program, tended to offer remediation in relatively structured situations. In districts where the state set only general guidelines for the program, and in small districts, remediation usually occurred as part of standard classroom instruction. District staff generally felt that the remedial services being offered were meeting the needs of their students, but we noted a disquieting lack of data on whether or not all students needing

help were actually being served. In fact, while most of the states with state-wide testing and state-established standards have developed very good data bases to describe the results of their testing programs, there has been little effort to describe remediation. In those states without such formal MCT programs, good descriptive data about remedial services are even rarer, and only a few districts in those states collect sufficient data to keep track of MCT failures. Further, in only one district was research being conducted to determine the relative effectiveness of alternative remedial strategies.

District general funds provided the major share of resources across all sample districts for MCT-related remediation. State funds played a major role in districts in six of the thirteen states. Federal funds generally were not a major funding resource. In local districts with relatively formal remedial programs where the costs were not largely covered by state funds, funding was frequently a problem. The solution usually involved redirecting some local funds, finding new local funds, and using federal funds. Where states supported remediation, funding was rarely a problem, and in districts where remediation was a part of the normal instructional process funding was not a problem. The most important single source of federal funds was ESEA Title I. Funds from other federal programs (including CETA and other ESEA titles) were used in several districts, but no pattern was noted for use of these funding sources. The use of Title I funds did not constitute a redirection of those resources in any of the districts included in the study; some potential problems may exist, however, related to the "required by law," "proportionate share," and "comparability" provisions of the Title I regulations.

Funding for other programs in the districts included in this study was affected negatively only in those situations where no state funds were supplied and the district had a relatively formal remedial program. In some of those

districts, the frequency with which some electives were offered was reduced or class sizes were increased; in other districts in this group, funds for new programs designed to address other district priorities were redirected to help support the remedial effort. We also noted a few cases in which state funds for remediation had actually made it possible to bolster other program areas through redirection of local or other state resources.

We conclude this report not with recommendations for new programs or changes in legislation or regulations, but with a suggestion. Since this study did identify several areas which, from a federal perspective, may indicate potential problems, we suggest that federal officials continue to monitor the field. Such monitoring could occur as a byproduct of other ED studies looking at aspects of compensatory education. For example, as part of NIE's School Finance Project study of "Federal and State Roles in the Administration of Federal and Related State Education Programs for Special Pupil Populations" (RFP-NIE-R-81-0011), the contractor could be instructed to investigate how states and districts with MCT programs interpret and implement Title I regulations related to the provision of MCT-related remedial services. At this time, we do not feel that the potential problems are serious enough to warrant conducting specific studies or even modifying current grantee reporting requirements. Other studies can incorporate these concerns, and ongoing federal and state monitoring activities should be sufficient to detect specific problems. If other studies indicate that potential problems have become real, such as a misuse of Title I funds or the resegregation of minorities into "remedial tracks," then it might be appropriate for the federal government to consider more detailed investigations to determine the extent of those specific problems.

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